

IMPORTANT: READ IF YOU USE a 15-PASSENGER VAN

REDUCING THE RISK OF ROLLOVER CRASHES IN 15-PASSANGER VANS *

What increases the risk of rollover crashes?

Recent research conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has found that the risk of a rollover crash is greatly increased when 10 or more people ride a 15-passenger van. This increased risk occurs because the passenger weight raises the vehicle's center of gravity and causes it to shift rearward. As a result, the van has less resistance to rollover and handles differently from other commonly driven passenger vehicles, making it more difficult to control in an emergency situation. Placing any load on the roof also raises the center of gravity and increases the likelihood of a rollover.

What situations can cause a rollover?

Three major situations can lead to a rollover in a 15-passenger van.

- The van goes off a rural road. If this occurs, the van is likely to overturn when it strikes a ditch or embankment or when it is tripped by an object or runs into soft soil.
- The driver is fatigued or driving too fast for conditions. A tired driver can dose off and lose control. The driver can also lose control when traveling at a high speed causing the van to slide sideways off the road. The grassy or dirt medians that line highways can cause the van to overturn when tires dig into the dirt.
- The driver overcorrects the steering as a panic reaction to an emergency or to a wheel dropping off the pavement. Especially at freeway speeds, this situation can cause the driver to lose control, resulting in the van sliding sideways and rolling over.

How can I protect my passengers?

Over the past decade, 80 percent of people killed in rollover crashes in 15-passenger vans were unbelted. Passengers can dramatically reduce their risk of being killed or seriously injured in a rollover crash by simply using their seat belts. Child care centers that utilize 15-passenger vans must have a seat belt use policy. Drivers must be responsible for enforcing this policy.

Does an experienced driver make a difference?

Significant differences in the design and handling characteristics of a 15-passenger van make it drive differently from other passenger vehicles. Therefore, a child care center should select one or two experienced drivers to drive the van on a regular basis. These drivers will gain valuable experience handling the van. This experience will help make each trip a safe one.

How can rollover crashes be prevented?

Because most rollover crashes don't involve other vehicles, they are often preventable. Here are some tips for drivers to minimize the risk of a rollover crash and serious injury.

- Avoid conditions that lead to loss of control. Never drive while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Make sure you are well rested and attentive, and always slow down if roads are wet or icy.
- Drive cautiously on rural roads. Be particularly cautious on curved rural roads and maintain a safe speed to avoid running off the road.
- Know what to do if your wheels drop off the roadway. If your wheels drop off the roadway, or pavement, gradually reduce speed and steer back onto the roadway when it safe to do so.
- Properly maintain your tires. Make sure your tires are properly inflated and the tread is not worn down. Worn tires can cause your van to slide sideways on wet or slippery pavement. Improper inflation can cause handling problems that can lead to catastrophic tire failures, such as blowouts. Therefore, check the tire pressure and treadware once a month.

What are other considerations for safe driving?

- When the van is not full, passenger should sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle.
- More than 15 people should never be allowed to ride in a 15-passenger van.
- Because a 15 passenger van is substantially longer and wider than a car, it:
 - 1) Requires more space and additional reliance on the side-view mirrors while changing lanes.
 - 2) Does not respond well to abrupt steering maneuvers.
 - 3) Requires additional braking time.

How do I ensure my van is safe to operate?

15-passenger vans may be taken to the nearest highway patrol inspection to be safety checked. Washington state law determines the requirements for the use of a motor vehicle.

*** This information was provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.**